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SUBJECT: ARGENTINA: OPPOSITION EFFORTS TO FORM A COALITION
TO OPPOSE KIRCHNER

Classified By: CDA Michael Matera for Reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: On October 6 Charge and Poloff met with former President and former Senator Federico Ramon Puerta, who wanted to discuss his concerns over the status of democracy in Argentina. Puerta expressed grave concern over the likelihood of fraud in the October 29 Constitutional Convention in Misiones Province to allow unlimited Gubernatorial re-elections, and over the erosion of the multiparty system in Argentina through a burgeoning trend towards eliminating term limits. Puerta highlighted efforts to build a coalition of like-minded non-Kirchnerista Peronists to strengthen the Peronist opposition to Kirchner, and plans to ally this coalition with other opposition parties to defeat Kirchner in the ballottage of the 2007 Presidential elections. In separate meetings with Emboffs, other opposition party members have expressed growing interest in forming a broader coalition to challenge Kirchner in 2007. END SUMMARY.

Threat to Democracy in Misiones

12. (U) On October 6 Charge and Poloff met with former President and former Senator Federico Ramon Puerta, who wanted to discuss his concerns over the status of democracy in Argentina. He said his concern focused first on the efforts to change the provincial constitution in Misiones to allow unlimited reelection of the Governor. Puerta explained there are essentially two fronts of politicians campaigning on this issue: current Governor Carlos Rovira's group in favor of the constitutional change to allow unlimited reelections, and Bishop Joaquin Pina's opposition to changing the constitution. Pina is currently "six points" ahead in polls, according to Puerta. This number has risen two points since Kirchner visited the province in late September. Puerta felt this demonstrated that, although Kirchner enjoys high approval ratings in Misiones, his visit to Misiones had negatively affected public opinion of Governor Rovira's efforts to change the provincial constitution, and that the people of Misiones do not support the change. Puerta also felt that this might be the first sign that public approval of Kirchner is slipping.

13. (U) Puerta indicated his desire to have international observers participate in the Misiones elections on October 29, due to his strong suspicion that the only way for Governor Rovira to effect the constitutional change would be

through fraud. He said that he thought fraud would be impossible if the Constitutional Assembly were monitored by an impartial international organization, like the Carter Center. He had at first considered inviting Brazilian monitors, but Brazil's balloting for the Presidential elections will be held the same day.

Opposition Efforts to Ally

¶4. (U) Puerta highlighted efforts to build a coalition of like-minded non-Kirchnerista Peronists to strengthen the Peronist opposition to Kirchner, and hopes to ally this coalition with other opposition parties to defeat Kirchner in the balloting of the 2007 Presidential elections. The non-K Peronists include former President Eduardo Duhalde, Congressman Juan Jose Alvarez (NOTE: He was recently exposed as having worked for SIDE during the military dictatorship. END NOTE.), Salta Governor Juan Carlos Romero, and former President Adolfo Rodriguez Saa. Rodriguez Saa and Governor Romero are silent partners, since, according to Puerta, they feel that they cannot publicly support the coalition without facing political, personal, or professional repercussions. Puerta believes that once the non-K Peronists form a strong foundation, they can align with other opposition figures--such as center-right leader Mauricio Macri, former Econ Minister Roberto Lavagna, Neuquen Governor and presidential candidate Jorge Sobisch, and even anti-K Piquetero leader Raul Castells--to beat Kirchner in the balloting of the presidential elections in 2007. Leading center-left opposition leader Elisa Carrio will almost certainly be a candidate for President and Puerta speculated that her candidacy will take a large number of votes away from Kirchner. Puerta suggested that this speculation figures prominently as part of the calculus behind believing the broad coalition of non-K Peronists and other opposition parties can beat Kirchner.

¶5. (C) In a separate meeting with Charge, prominent businessman and national Peronist Congressman Francisco de Narvaez also indicated his willingness to work with the center-right opposition parties, like Mauricio Macri's Propuesta Republicana(PRO) and the Union Civica Radical (UCR). Narvaez has already announced his candidacy for Governor of Buenos Aires Province and his support for Lavagna for President. He told Emboff that he would like to see Macri run for Mayor in the Capital. (NOTE: Narvaez is a member of the El General group within the Peronist Party that is in opposition to Kirchner and that aligns a number of mostly pro-Duhalde Peronists. END NOTE.) Members of Neuquen Governor Jorge Sobisch's party told Emboff in a separate meeting that the party is meeting with UCR members, anti-K peronists, and PRO representatives to explore the possibilities of aligning to defeat Kirchner. (COMMENT: Although Sobisch has already announced his candidacy for the 2007 Presidential elections, he has consistently received less than one percent approval in polls. He is widely considered to be a non-factor in the current run-up to the 2007 elections. END COMMENT.)

¶6. (C) COMMENT: If Misiones is really the microcosm of Argentina that political analyst Rosenda Fraga has described it to be, then we should start to see increased cooperation among diverse political groups to oppose Kirchner and his party. Bishop Pina's warnings about the threat to democracy in Misiones has motivated an impressive coalition of non-traditional allies to work together. This phenomenon seems to be gaining traction at the national level, based on Puerta's description of efforts by non-Kirchnerista Peronists, and on other opposition parties' comments on increased willingness to enter alliances. The surprising results in the Brazilian Presidential elections have also served as a lesson for Argentina; Ingacio Lula da Silva was thought to be guaranteed an easy victory, but the resulting balloting has his reelection in doubt. Perhaps this example has motivated the non-K Peronists and other opposition

parties to re-energize their efforts and consider broader
coalitions with new perspective. END COMMENT.
MATERA